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TURKMENISTAN

SUCCESS STORY

Busy as a Bee

USAID Assistance Helps Turkmenistan's Beekeepers Expand Business



Photo: EDP

Bottling Turkmen Bal honey in jars sterilized with equipment purchased through USAID's Enterprise Development Project.

"Thanks to USAID, we are one step closer to realizing our mid and long-term objectives for the organization."

-Maya Ovezova.

In mid-2003, a group of beekeepers attended a training course on preparing business plans, offered by the USAID Enterprise Development Project (EDP), implemented by Pragma Corporation. The training generated a number of discussions, and prompted the 17 participants to establish a Beekeepers Association. The beekeepers decided that pooling their efforts would help them to compete against local and Russian honey producers in Turkmenistan. By the end of 2003, Turkmen Bal (Turkmen Honey) became one of the first registered economic associations in the country.

Turkmen Bal began producing honey in small jars for the local Turkmen market in early 2004. Using their skills from the training, the beekeepers identified several problems hindering their operations: lack of sufficient labor, cumbersome bottling operations, and a complete absence of a marketing strategy. The association applied for an EDP grant; and, in the spring of 2005, using the awarded funds, acquired new honey bottling equipment, with the capacity to process 400 kilograms of honey per hour. With further support from USAID's project, the association bought special heat equipment to sterilize honey jars. "This equipment enabled us to produce high quality honey products which comply with state government standards and sanitary norms," says Maya Ovezova, Chairman of Turkmen Bal. USAID also assisted the association in developing a marketing and sales strategy. An aggressive advertising and sales campaign helped establish brand name recognition for the product.

Now customers can buy honey in the new Turkmen Bal shop in Ashgabat. During the first month of the shop's opening, the association sold more than 2 million manats worth of honey. In addition, the association began selling production in bulk to Yampash, the biggest shopping center in Ashgabat. The association plans to hire a full-time sales manager and increase the product mix, as was advised by EDP. "We hope that in the near future we will be able to expand markets both in Turkmenistan and internationally," said Ovezova.

Telling Our Story

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